

The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 22 March 1968



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DAILY BRIEF
22 MARCH 1968

1. Vietnam

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Intercepts suggest at least 14-- and perhaps as many as 16--infiltration groups passed through the Thanh Hoa area of North Vietnam in the first two weeks of March. Four of these units reported strengths to higher headquarters which averaged out to about a battalion apiece. If the others were of roughly the same size, we would guess that close to the equivalent of two divisions came through Thanh Hoa.

2. Burma

According to a captured document, the Peking-oriented White Flag Communists have been ordered to mount a terrorist campaign on 28 March to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of their insurgency. Much of the action would probably occur in the countryside of southern Burma, where most of the 4,000 White Flags operate, but there might also be isolated acts of terrorism in Rangoon.

We doubt the Communists can cause a very big stir. Neither the White Flags nor any other insurgent group in Burma can carry on a sustained campaign. Besides, the government is already conducting precautionary sweeps.

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3. Israel-Jordan

The border is quiet. Israeli troops have withdrawn after the most serious military operations since the June war.

Casualties seem to have been fairly heavy on both sides, although accurate figures are hard to come by. The Israelis claim they killed 150 "saboteurs" and inflicted substantial losses on regular Jordanian Army units. In addition to one aircraft and several armored vehicles, Tel Aviv admits to losing 21 killed and 70 wounded.

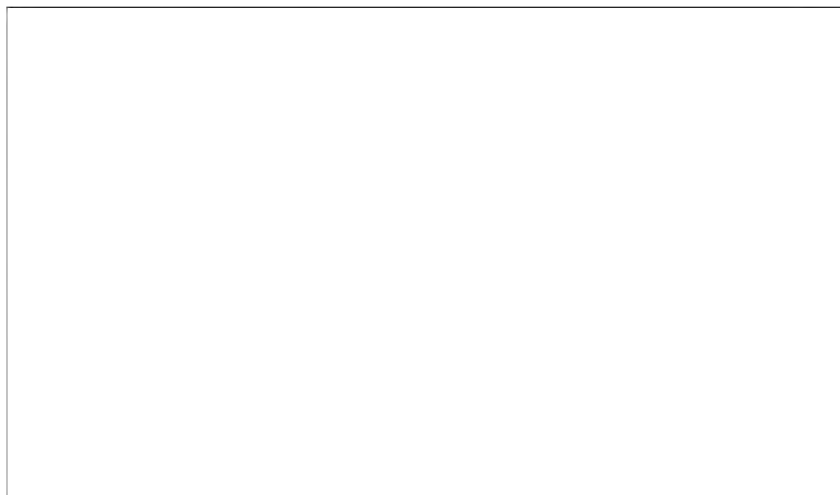
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King Husayn has called for an Arab summit conference, which will probably be held soon. So far, Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, Sudan, and Yemen have said they will come. Husayn's request for a meeting was couched in terms clearly intended to show how fed up he has become with all of the empty sloganizing about Arab unity.

In the United Nations, the odds are that the Security Council will not go along with Jordan's demand for punitive measures against Israel. However, the council may condemn breaches of the cease-fire from whatever source and demand that past resolutions be carried out.

4. Rhodesia

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5. Czechoslovakia

President Novotny is all but out. He has indicated he is ready to resign, and the Central Committee has announced it is ready to allow him to shed the burdens of office.

His most likely successor is Joseph Smrkovsky, a leading advocate of "democratization."

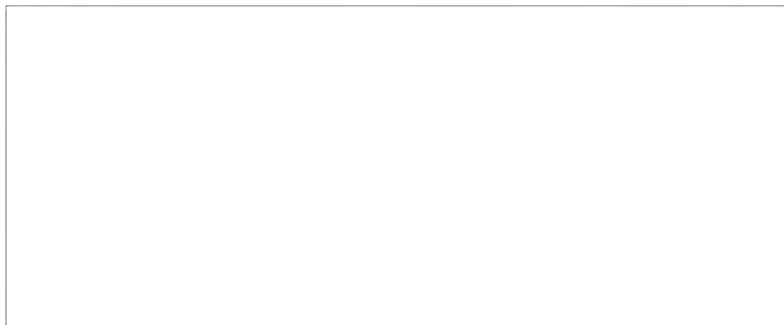
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Ambassador Sullivan reports a distinct change in the comportment of the Czechoslovakian chargé in Vientiane since the big changes in Prague. Not only has the chargé spoken gleefully to his Western colleagues about developments at home, but he has also begun to be more objective about Communist activities in Laos. For example, he recently spoke critically to Americans and Lao-tians of North Vietnamese/Pathet Lao shelling of Saravane and Attapeu.

Sullivan suspects other East Europeans there share the Czechoslovak's doubts about Ho Chi Minh's abuse of his neighbors.

6. Nigeria

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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

Special Daily Report on North Vietnam



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Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
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I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION

Swedish Soundings in Hanoi: Recent Swedish probings of North Vietnam's position on negotiations evidently turned up nothing new. Ambassador Petri, Sweden's envoy to Peking, visited Hanoi as part of this effort in late February and early March. He gave a rambling account of his adventures to US Embassy officers in Stockholm on 15 March. Petri refused to be pinned down on details of just who said what and to whom, but his message was both clear and familiar: Hanoi is not interested in negotiations except on its own terms.

Petri was told by the North Vietnamese a year and a half ago that if the bombing is stopped, "we know what we will have to do." He says this ambiguous statement still characterizes the basic North Vietnamese position. The leaders in Hanoi firmly rejected the concept of reciprocity and said the President's San Antonio formula is unacceptable because it would be "capitulation."

Petri's impressions of the Communist scenario for negotiations is standard stuff. He said Hanoi would respond promptly to a bombing halt which is "definite and conclusive," but he also made clear that the North Vietnamese think of postbombing talks only as preliminaries for setting up negotiations with the Liberation Front. These, in turn, would be concerned basically with working out a US withdrawal. Hanoi rules out participation in negotiations by the present Saigon government, but Petri suggested that a "suitable" government (a coalition?) in Saigon could take part.

Petri also received the standard Vietnamese Communist pitch of how Hanoi cannot speak for the National Liberation Front. He apparently buys the dubious proposition of "differences" between the Front and Hanoi over negotiations. His contacts with both parties convinced him that Hanoi is more interested in negotiations than spokesmen for the Front, whom he characterized as "tough guys" operating independently of the North Vietnamese.

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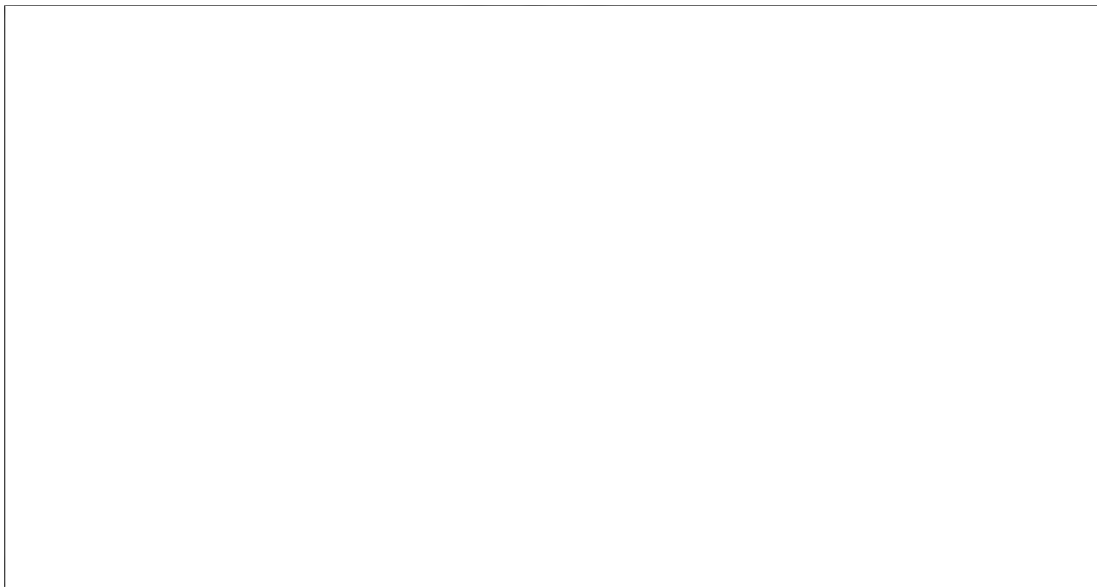
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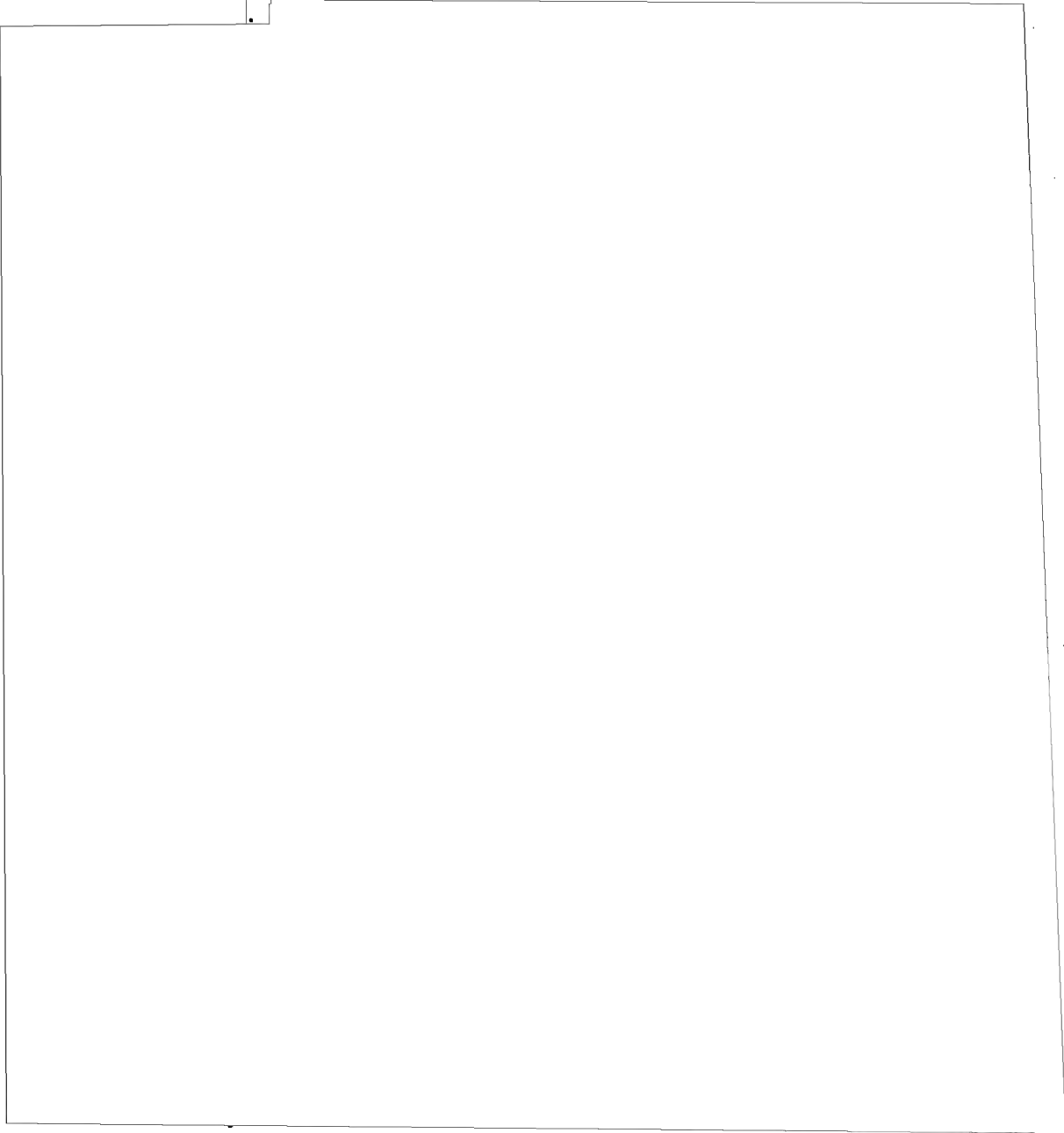


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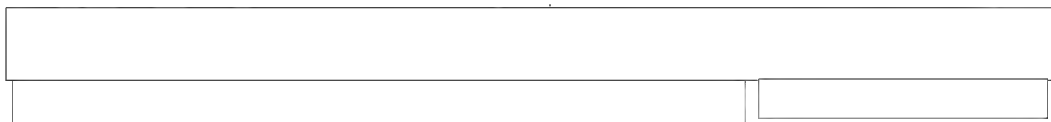
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II. NORTH VIETNAMESE REFLECTIONS OF US POLITICAL ATTITUDES ON THE WAR

Hanoi may be Intensifying Effort to Influence
American Opinion: In recent weeks, North Vietnam has
opened its doors to selected American leftists and
influential correspondents. [REDACTED]
writer Mary McCarthy and Professor Franz Schurmann
are now in Hanoi, and American newsmen William Baggs
and Harry Ashmore have been given permission to make

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another trip. Walter Cronkite has also apparently received permission to enter North Vietnam.

[REDACTED]

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Hanoi Highlights Critical Statements in US Press:
In its English language broadcast on 20 March, Hanoi gave particular attention to recent comments in US news media critical of the US position on Vietnam. The broadcast quoted the Long Island daily Newsday stating that the US position in Vietnam was steadily deteriorating and that US troops should be withdrawn. The news department of NBC was also quoted as saying that the war in Vietnam was being lost when judged against the Johnson administration's expressed reasons for pursuit of the conflict. Recent statements by NBC correspondent Frank McGee and Walter Cronkite of CBS questioning the US commitment were also reported. In sum, the broadcast noted that the American press has underlined that the US cannot turn the tide of the war even by sending in more troops.

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